

## Not Wishing That Any Should Perish

03/05/2025

### Scripture 1: (2 Pet. 3:1-18 ESV)

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing that any should perish**, but that all should reach repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

## Sermon:

The season of Lent is not something commanded by Scripture, nor is tonight's "Ash Wednesday" gathering. Yet they do belong to the historic practice and tradition of the Christian, catholic church (little "c" catholic). Like Advent and Christmas, they are neither required nor necessary but when considered rightly, they can still be helpful and beneficial to the Body of Christ, the Church (BCO 47-6).

Lent was originally meant as a season of preparation: a time of quiet contemplation and anticipation before intentionally recalling our Savior's passion and celebrating His resurrection; but really, that is what we ought to do every day, and every week since we proclaim and celebrate the good news found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus during each Sunday worship service. Therefore, many of the common Lenten practices may and should be ignored or discarded as either being not biblically justified or as not beneficial (BCO 47-9).

Yet, Ash Wednesday is different. It actually shares a great deal in common with the celebration of Christmas, as a particularly memorialized worship service. During both of these services, we specifically focus upon one, often neglected element of our Christian faith and practice. Christmas focuses our minds on the birth of Jesus and His Incarnation, while Ash Wednesday focuses our hearts upon our need for repentance as our response of faith to God's grace which has been given to us already. Much less extravagant and less beautiful than the joy-filled worship of Christmas, Ash Wednesday is somber, sober, and seems severe because that is our rightful response once we know and understand why Jesus was born, and what He died to rescue us from: our wickedness, sin, and iniquity.

We celebrate Christmas with joy because of the redeeming benefit that Christ attained for us, but we celebrate on Ash Wednesday with sorrow: with dust and ashes; because we know what that benefit cost Jesus and because we understand what we deserve apart from His merciful grace and love. When we receive the ashes on our foreheads, it is as a symbol reminding us of our need to be humble and grateful. It is nothing more than a public sign of our repentance and contrition, a biblically founded expression (Genesis 18:27; 2 Samuel 13:19; Esther 4:1-4; Job 2:8, 30:19, 42:6; Isaiah 61:3; Jeremiah 6:26; Ezekiel 27:30; Daniel 9:3; Jonah 3:6; Luke 10:13) when done rightly and with earnest and Christ-centered intention (unlike as described in Isaiah 58, particularly v5).

Repentance is something that no one likes to talk about, especially in this place, day, and age. Few people are willing to admit their faults or failings. Few people are willing to take responsibility for their actions or accept the consequences. We clearly see this when looking at our modern culture, but American Christianity is also nearly, if not as bad.

The widely broadcast "American evangelical gospel" rapidly chases the popular *zeitgeist*, the "spirit of the age", instead of proclaiming the spirit of Christ Jesus. Churches soon become "service providers" while congregants become "consumers". Many people move between particular churches or even denominations because of this consumer mindset and attitude. They move around because they are looking for what they want in a church, rather than looking for the things which God wants to be in a church or rather, instead of looking for who and what God created the church to be.

The Church is meant to be a:

- a sanctuary for the fearful;
- a hospital for the sick and a place of rest for the tired;
- a place of help for the helpless and hope for the hopeless;

- a place to worship, praise, and return thanks to our God and King, rather than a place for entertainment, enjoyment, or self righteousness and self congratulation;
- a place to gather and be encouraged as we are being transformed and conformed into who God created us to be, rather than who the world, Satan, and our sinful natures have corrupted us into being.

While most people like to serve and to help those in need, they fail and refuse to acknowledge their own problems and needs. Many people love to talk about love, but they hate hearing the Truth be told, especially when it is told “in love” and it goes against their desires. Many people simply want to be just affirmed and told that they are “Okay”; that they are “Perfectly Fine” just the way they are. A lot of people claim to love Jesus, but few people want to live like Him, especially when it becomes challenging and uncomfortable, or when it is not socially acceptable and socially conforming. Lots of people will say they want Jesus because of what they believe He will give them, but that only lasts as long as He makes no demands upon them:

- so long as He leaves them alone;
- so long as He does not command them to stop doing the wrong and evil things they do;
- so long as He does not command them to be changed; and,
- so long as He does not command them to abandon their sin.

Sin is a terrible thing; a terribly resistant thing. Once it becomes embedded and entrenched within a person, there is no easy way to remove it. Alternative religions and philosophies, moralities, or ideals might make the cancer of sin seem to shrink (or even disappear for a time) but, there is no pill or therapy that will actually make it go away forever. No practice of religion can ever make you good enough to earn or deserve entry into heaven. All that our best works can do is make us fit and deserving of hell. The only true, certain, and sure remedy for sin is to amputate it: outright, total removal; and only Jesus Christ can do that, by God's grace through our faith in Him, alone.

Knowing that, and believing that Jesus suffered and died in order to pay your deserved penalty for sin is why we Christians need to respond with repentance. If you care about Jesus, if you care about Jesus the way that He cares for you, then of course you should want to repent because, repentance means that you first stop doing the wrong that you do, and then you turn around and do the right that you should; because you do not want to feel guilty and responsible for having increased His suffering even more than you already know.

Across both the Old and New Testaments, the word “to repent” is a very physical verb and that sense carries over into its metaphysical and spiritual application and understanding.

- The Hebrew word is *shuv*, which literally means “to turn around”; not just “every now and then” but really, to turn around once and for all. It describes a full reversal and complete change in direction.
- The Greek word is *metanoia*, which describes a complete change of mind. It describes a reversal of a person's attitude and opinion; of thinking, believing, and acting differently and contrary to how they once did.

Both of these terms describe a physical, mental, and spiritual activity which first, requires a person to stop doing something and then second, to start doing the opposite; to make a complete 180 degree change since, any less or any more would not be a true reversal. True repentance requires that:

- First, we hate our sin, because God hates our sin.

- Second, that we stop sinning with intention (as much as we are able to choose to; a slow and often painful process and part of our progressive and cooperative sanctification).
- Third, that then we start living righteously by obeying God's commandments.
- Fourth and most consequentially, that we obey Christ's command to “make disciples” and to “teach them to keep His commandments” (Matthew 28:18-20). This make our individual and personal repentance more important because we each serve as examples, as witnesses, as martyrs of the faith in practice to help convince and call the Elect out from the sinful world that is perishing.

So, while our individual repentance is for our own good, it is also for the good of others and for their hope of salvation. Our needful practice of and participation in this consequence, as faithful Christians, is what Peter exhorted and explained to the early church, “*But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing that any should perish**, but that all should reach repentance.*”.

{Sadly, we often take the first part of this statement completely out of context, in order to try and justify alternative and unbiblical understanding of God's initial work of creation. Peter is not writing about any sort of temporal relativity.}

Saying that, to God {one day is like ten thousand years}, Peter means for us to understand that the passage of time does not matter to God {not that it is irrelevant or unimportant}; God is not as concerned with how long it will take because the result has been certain and sure ever since He decreed it before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). It will take as long as it will take because that is how long God intends for it to take.

Peter also reminds us that God is not being slowed. He is not being delayed. He is not being hindered or prevented from completing His eschatological plan. God is patient towards us, for our good and for His glory. God is being patient with us because He is “...*not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*”, and He is waiting until, as Paul tells us, “...*the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*” (Rom. 11:25 ESV); until **all** of God's Elect have been called, regenerated, redeemed, justified, sanctified, and glorified (Romans 8:28-30).

Unfortunately, although the LORD does not wish or desire any to perish, that does not mean that He also will's that no one would perish. Scripture and our experiences teach us clearly that not everyone is or will be saved. Therefore, our immediate, regular, and constant repentance is very necessary because, while the LORD is patient, His patience is not infinite: it has a firm limit {just like the number of the Elect}; and it will run out some day. It will run out and we do not know when. Therefore, the time for our repentance is now! We must not delay or bide our time. We must not wait because we risk the time becoming too late!

So, today, tonight, and now, in this moment, repent of your sins. Pray for the Holy Spirit's help to change and transform your heart and mind. Pray for God's forgiveness and believe the Gospel of Christ, that you will be (and are) saved and justified by the blood of Jesus Christ, shed for you. Humble yourself before the LORD and repent. Turn around and live righteously, for Jesus' sake because He lived, died, and rose again for your sake.

**AMEN**